

Chapter 19

An Alternative Approach to Textbook Marketing in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Textbook is still the most indispensable part of many educational systems. Therefore, having accurate information on the attributes which attract its consumers is of utmost importance for the textbook market analysts, writers and publishers. To this end, this chapter first questions the methodology of the current textbook market needs analysis and then suggests and employs conjoint methodology as the alternative for this purpose. To illustrate the value of this approach, the responses of 450 participants to 32 profile cards based on a scale from 1 to 7 underwent conjoint analysis. The results provided a more comprehensive picture of the participants' preferences for each of the surveyed attributes and their accompanying levels. The findings are especially valuable for three groups: for textbook market analysts who might consider using this methodology in their future investigations and for the authors and publishers who might use the findings in planning and publishing books for this research context.

INTRODUCTION

Textbook is a composite whole resource for a wide variety of audiences: It serves as an aid and a context for students' learning and supporting their understanding of the subject; as a guide for teachers who may follow it very closely; as a hidden curriculum for the syllabus designers to standardize the quantity and quality of the education; and as a reference for other stakeholders to measure what has been learnt in an educational program. However, despite the fact that book market is flooded with materials of different types and subjects to support all levels of teaching and learning, not all books are being received with similar level of enthusiasm by their audience. This raises the question of what attributes in the published textbooks make some desirable and the others undesirable for students and lecturers, and what attributes

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are required to be promoted by the academic book industry to address the needs of the consumers in different geographical regions.

The EFL (English as a foreign language) book market is an enormous market in the book industry all around the world because first English is the most common language of communication and the most widely used lingua franca today (Pakir 2009) and second English it has profound effects not only on business but also on the education of the next generation (Sharifian 2009). Besides, English textbooks are valuable resources for foreign language learners who are said to mainly develop by them (Razmjoo, 2007). However, many EFL learners and teachers complain that available textbooks do not either match their needs or even if they do, they are unnecessarily expensive. Publishers for EFL also are aware that this negative attitude towards the EFL textbooks is a likely threat to their business and hence their survival in EFL book markets (Briles, Briles, Frishman, & Kremer, 2011). In the meantime, materials development for language learning was suggested to be turned into a field in its own right (Tomlinson, 2016) and hence, authors and publishers are expected to have a clear knowledge of the attributes which are likely to enhance purchase in the book market. These attributes can be addressed two ways: (1) Product driven, in which the author seeks to develop materials based on personal beliefs and individual ideas and (2) Market driven, where the publisher identifies market needs and tries to develop profile of market gaps (Browne, 2010). This study is more interested in the latter approach.

Until recent past, the most common method in textbook marketing has been using questionnaires and interviews as data collection techniques by the authors and publishers who asked consumers about their new book to find out whether or not they would like the book if they published it. However, opponents argue that relying on these kinds of methods alone may not be appropriate for the accurate identification of consumer preferences, because in these methods, each question asked addresses just one attribute at a time and ignores the fact that the attributes are made up of levels and each individual may exhibit various degrees of preference in each attribute and level if combined (Louviere, Hensher, & Swait, 2000). This drawback suggests that an alternative approach has to be introduced which is able to take all the possible combinations of the attributes and levels of the intended product into account and generate multiple numbers of profiles which are slightly different in each of the attributes defined.

Conjoint methodology is the alternative framework which meets such need by designing profiles which are capable of describing various ranges of features in a product (Louviere, et al., 2000). Therefore, unlike common market research questionnaires and interviews which involve a degree of uncertainty, the realistic context of simulations and the complex behaviors that conjoint methodology produces has made this approach an ideal candidate for textbook market research.

This study has used conjoint methodology to empirically investigate EFL market preferences for textbooks at academic level. To do so, the full-profile conjoint analysis (also known as full-concept) approach is used to measure users' preferences of textbooks. The rest of this chapter is structured as follows. Section 2, called the background to the study, provides broad definitions and discussions of textbooks for college students and teachers in Iran and incorporate views of others on how textbooks enter the academic market (literature review) to demonstrate that the current methodology behind decisions on textbooks is inefficient. Section 3 presents the main focus of the study and suggests conjoint model as the alternative methodology for this purpose. Section 4 covers the solutions and recommendations of the conjoint study and future research directions, and finally section 5 concludes this chapter by stating the implications of this study.

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